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have realized that a teacher ④
can consider himself fortunate if
he exerts a decisive influence
on the lives of just a few
students in the course of his
whole teaching career. Yet you
gave up after 2 years because
your rosy expectations of
influencing students quickly and
easily were not realized. Those
expectations must have been
the result of self-deception.

You recall the letter in
which I suggested to our
parents that they should
discourage you from getting
close to Linda Erikson. I
wrote to this effect: "Dave
may claim his interest in
Linda Erikson is purely
platonic, but ... [citing
evidence to the contrary]".
You wrote me 2 letters on
this, the first very angry,
the second apologetic. In the
first letter you said that
the main reason you were
angry was because of the
implication that you were
weak and needed to be
guided for your own good.
In the second letter (and
also in a recent letter on
this subject) you said that

Dear Dave: ①

As for that essay I was going
to write on the way you think, I
haven't got around to it yet.
It would be a big project, and
I've been too damn busy on
account of that root cellar
and other stuff, and I do like
to have some time to take it
easy, too. So instead of writing
down everything I wanted to say,
I'll just send you an instalment
now, covering one of the main
points that I wanted to cover.
You can answer back, if you
like, and then we'll see where
to go from there.

I ask you to remember
that, although I'm going to
say some things that I
expect you'll find highly
unpleasant, I'm not motivated
by antagonism. It's just
that I'm tired of having to
conceal the opinions that
I'm going to express, as
explained in an earlier letter.

The point that I want to
cover in this letter is: your
habitual self-deception. I'll
begin by mentioning a few simple
instances of it.

As a small boy (I suppose

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you were about 7 at the time) ②
you refused to admit that you were ever going to die.

Also at about that age you insisted that your injured hand was stronger than the other. I recall suggesting to you that you were only telling yourself this because it was an attractive idea, but still you insisted that your left hand was stronger. In adulthood you admitted that this was self-deception.

You might be excused for self-deception in childhood, but the trait has persisted into adult life.

When we took that trip through Canada (in 1969 I think it was) you confidently asserted, "I think I could become a published author." I challenged you to do it, at the same time warning you that it wasn't so easy as you thought. "No," you said, "I think I could become a published author. It wouldn't be hard." By this time I trust you know better.

That same summer you wrote that story "Practical Gas", which (as by this ③
time I trust you will agree) was just adolescent silliness, and which could never have been accepted even by the cheapest pulp magazine. You could readily be excused for submitting such a story diffidently and with grave doubts as to the likelihood of its acceptance. But that wasn't the frame of mind in which you submitted it. You said repeatedly, "I think it will be accepted," which seems to me a rather gross instance of self-deception. (Our parents also thought it would be accepted — an indication of the extent of <u>their</u> self-deception.)

When you took up teaching you apparently did so under the illusion that you were going to change the lives of many students simply by expounding your ideas to them. Of course you soon learned better. You are certainly intelligent enough to

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that one is wonderful. If that becomes impossible, then the most comfortable thing is to imagine that one is worthless. In either of these cases one <u>avoids psychological conflict</u>. The difficult things are the in-betweens: to assess oneself objectively; to remain in doubt about oneself where rational self-knowledge is not attainable; to struggle for self-knowledge; or to struggle to make oneself into what one wants to be. These involve psychological stress and strain.

When it is no longer possible to believe that one is what one wants to be in some aspect of life, the easiest thing is to just give up on that aspect of life, saying "I'm no good at this. This isn't an important thing anyway", and then retreat to some area where it is still possible to maintain one's illusion of superiority.

Here we make the connection with your philosophical views. You have very high aspirations. For you it is not enough to just be as good as others. You have to be someone special.

the main reason you were angry was that (as you claimed) I was accusing you of "dishonesty" or of "lying" when I suggested that you were misrepresenting the nature of your interest in L. Erikson.

Now, this supposed reason for your anger just doesn't stand up.

First, I think it was fairly clear in the context of my letter that I was accusing you not of lying but of self-deception.

Second, suppose I <u>had</u> been accusing you of conscious untruth. It would have been in an area where untruth is accepted by everyone, and it would have been a kind of untruth to which the term "lying" is not usually applied. Everyone knows that people are constantly concealing or misrepresenting their very deeply personal feelings, and most will agree that we have a right to do this because there is a certain personal zone in which we have a right to complete privacy, even if we

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have to tell a few fibs to maintain it. If someone asked me whether I was sexually attracted to a certain girl I would feel perfectly free to say "no" when the true answer was "yes", and I wouldn't consider that this would make me what is generally termed a "dishonest man". I think really you feel the same way, so there was no reason for you to get upset over an implication of this kind of "dishonesty", if you want to call it that.

Third, suppose I had accused you of untruth even in an area where untruth is not considered acceptable. Suppose I had written: "Dave may claim he got good grades in college, but actually I suspect his performance was pretty poor." If I had written that, you probably would have sent me a rebuke in an irritated tone, or perhaps even a moderately angry tone, but you would not have sent me the highly emotional, vituperative, and enraged letter

that you did send.

Obviously then, my supposed questioning of your honesty was not what got you so terribly upset. The real reason is the one you permitted to slip out in your first letter. My letter <u>did</u> convey an implication of weakness on your part. Somewhere "deep down inside" you <u>feel</u> weak; consequently that implication touched a raw nerve and you became enraged. You invented that rationalization about "honesty" because to admit that you were highly sensitive about the implication of weakness would be to admit that somewhere "deep down inside" you feel weak; and that is a highly uncomfortable admission. This I think is a highly characteristic example of your type of self-deception.

It would be possible to list other instances of self-deception on your part, but I guess the foregoing will suffice.

I don't mean to say that you are incapable of entertaining negative opinions about yourself. The most comfortable thing is to imagine

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observer might find important self-deceptions in me that I've never suspected. (12)

For yet another thing, in using myself as an example I'll have to make some very uncomfortable admissions. But I can't think of anyone else whom we both know intimately enough to serve as an example of non-self-deception. (Our parents won't do since they're both habitual self-deceivers.) So I guess I'll have to use myself.

First example: You will have noticed that I have a marked tendency to devalue social relationships — to consider them unimportant (except sometimes as means to an end) or even contemptible. There would seem to be more than one reason for this. One reason is that getting entangled in any sort of social relationships entails a certain loss of independence. Freedom, independence, and solitude tend to go together. If I fell prey to self-deception on this point (as I did when I was very young) I would insist that the foregoing and other closely related reasons were the only reasons for my negative attitude toward social relationships. But in order to be honest with myself I have to admit that there is another, critically important reason involved, and that is simple lack of

I'm the same way. But you are unwilling or unable to go through the struggle that it takes to be or do something special. Every time you encounter real difficulties you retreat, saying, "that's not the important thing anyway!" By this time you have retreated until you have just one thing left ... Art, or Philosophy, or whatever you prefer to call it. In this area you can always maintain your illusion of being superior to the common herd, because there are no objective criteria. Whatever happens, you can always persuade yourself that you are more sensitive, or thoughtful, or insightful (or whatever you want to call it) than the common herd. Of course you are particularly vehement in rejecting any sort of objective criteria for judging art or philosophy, and, leaving aside the merits of this position, your motive is clear: If you were to admit any objective criterion for judging art or philosophy, you would risk having your illusions disproved. But as long as there are no objective (9)

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criteria you can believe whatever you find most comfortable.

Because your self-esteem is based on your image of yourself as one who understands art and philosophy, you find it necessary to deny any concept of reality*. Even if you were right in your views on this subject, that wouldn't explain your obvious powerful emotional involvement in these views. You have to deny reality because (reluctant as you would be to admit it) you really feel "deep down inside" that reality is superior to any dream-world such as that of art or philosophy. If you didn't have this (unadmitted) feeling that reality is superior, you wouldn't need to deny reality. You might deny it anyway, but you would do so coolly and without the strong emotional involvement that you do have in that denial.

*I emphasize that I am not addressing myself here to the philosophical problem of truth or reality, but to the question of your motivations. I can put up with a difference of opinion. What inspires my contempt is your self-deception: this is something I've been itching for years to express my opinion on.

But since you do have an (unadmitted) feeling that reality is superior, you have to deny its existence, so that you can avoid the feeling of having retreated into what is, in comparison with reality, an ineffectual dream-world. Once again, what I am emphasizing here is not your denial of reality (which possibly could be defended) but your motive for that denial.

* * * * *

Now, as a contrasting example (i.e. an example of how one may avoid self-deception) I'm going to use — ahem — myself. I hesitate to do so for various reasons. For one thing, I'm afraid this may degenerate into an argument as to who is better than whom. That is, you may answer my criticisms of you by pointing out my faults (which are irrelevant, since my faults don't make your faults disappear). For another thing I don't suppose anyone can claim to be completely free of self-deception. Though I've made considerable effort to avoid it, it's always conceivable that an outside

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any other serious crime. (16)

Related to this is the question: Why do you and I perform more consciënciously on the job than most people when both of us have only contempt for most of the companies we've worked for? It would be easy to invent self-flattering explanations for this, which is what you probably do. But the real reason seems to be that we've been more successfully conditioned than most people to have a certain awe for authority (on an animal not an intellectual level). For us, to get fired from a job or to fail a course in school would be more shaming than it would for most people. Or at least it would have been when we were younger. We take (took?) such things more seriously than other people. You might do some introspecting about this, and also about why you never committed that vandalism against that Datsun dealer as you talked about doing. I'll admit, however, that this trait of ingrained, involuntary awe for authority is perhaps not so strongly developed in you as it is in me. The point of all this is that these are the kinds of admissions about oneself that you seldom make. Generally you concoct self-flattering explanations of your own motivations.

success in social relationships. (13)
From the age of about 8 on, I have consistently experienced one form or another of social rejection from most (though not quite all) of the groups with which I have been associated. Naturally this has led me to strongly downgrade the importance of social relationships. Since my negative attitude toward social relationships goes back to such an early age I am not in a position to assess the relative importance of all the factors causing it, but I can't honestly deny the very great importance of simple lack of success. I'm afraid that if you were in my position you would probably deny the importance of this very uninspiring reason.

The second example involves an even more humiliating confession than the one I have just made. As you know, I have no respect for law or morality. Why have I never committed any crime? (Of course, I'm not talking about something like shooting a grouse out of season now and then. I mean felony type stuff — burglary,

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arson, murder, etc.) Lack of motive? Hardly. As you know, I have a good deal of anger in me and there are lots of people I'd like to hurt. Risk? In some cases, yes. But there are other cases in which I can figure out ways of doing naughty things so that the risk would be insignificant. I am forced to the humiliating confession that the reason I've never committed any crime is that I have been successfully brainwashed by society. On an intellectual level I have only contempt for authority, but on an animal level I have all too much respect for it. My training has been quite successful in this regard and the strength of my conditioned inhibitions is such that I don't believe I could ever commit a serious crime. Knowing my attitude toward psychological manipulation of the individual by society, you can imagine how humiliating it is for me to admit to myself that I have been successfully

(15)

manipulated.

When I was much younger I used to tell myself that the only reason I didn't set fire to such and such a cocksucker's house was because of the risk, or because it wasn't worth the trouble, or (more often) I told myself that some day I would do it. But as I got older I became aware of the strength of my own inhibitions. If I had any last lingering illusions on that score they were dispelled by that incident with Ellen T. I was humiliated and enraged to such an extent that I thought I was really going to do it. (My intention was to give her a really vicious beating; and if her face got scarred up a little, so much the better. I'm talking about felony assault, or whatever they call it. The kind of thing people go to prison for.) But, by the time I was walking over to her car, I knew I wasn't going to do it. I didn't have an attack of conscience, and at the time I didn't care a shit about the consequences. I just knew I couldn't commit that or

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(20)

strain of resentment on your side is one of the reasons why I have lately come to feel uneasy about having my practical affairs tangled up with yours. Troublesome conflicts could result.

Well, I apologize for all this. All I can say is that these are my opinions, and I've been itching to express them for a long time, and my motive is not to hurt your feelings, even though I realize that that will be the probable result.

— Ted.

In a lighter vein — I have been astonished to detect the presence of a certain unequalled villain elsewhere than in the environs where we have been accustomed to find him:

"En Montes Claros el ejército español del conde de Caracena fué derrotado por el portugués (1665) del marqués de Marialva en el que figuraban tropas inglesas mandadas por Schomberg."

— Emilio González López, Historia de la Civilización Española, p. 373.

17

This concludes the discussion of your self-deception, but I'll mention one other matter in conclusion.

Throughout your childhood and even well up into your 20's you had a severe case of big-brother worship. (Of course, your tendency to self-deception has probably prevented you from ever admitting that it was a typical case of big-brother worship, since that would be a humiliating admission.) Because of this and because of the behavior of our weak and foolish parents, you always felt second-best to big brother. I suspect that this may have generated a certain amount of (possibly unconscious) resentment on your part. I don't doubt that you have a real affection for me, but I am suggesting that it may be mixed with a strain of (possibly unconscious) resentment.

One evidence of this is the fact that when you were a kid you would tell me little lies and then after you took me in you would laugh about it. The motive is pretty clear. You felt dominated by big brother, but by taking

Translated ↑ "En Montes Claros etc."

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him in with a tall tale (18)
you could be "one up" on him for a change.

I suspect that something similar was happening recently when you refused to admit the truth of that anecdote I recounted about the time when you got drunk and came prancing out of your room stark naked. Have you thought about the motive for your denial? Was it embarrassment? That may have been a contributing factor, but I don't think it's the whole explanation. For one thing, the incident wasn't all that embarrassing. For another thing, when you finally admitted the incident accidentally in front of the Meisters, you didn't seem in the least embarrassed. You just seemed vexed with yourself for having inadvertently spoiled your own little game. For a third thing, you could have just asked me not to remind people of the incident and you know I would have complied with any earnest request of that sort. Was your motive humor? That doesn't stand up either. It may be humorous at first to pretend (19)
that such an incident never occurred, but there is no further humor in persisting in the denial for weeks. Moreover, when you finally admitted the incident by accident, that was an occasion for humor, but instead of laughing about it you were just vexed with yourself.

I suggest that what was happening here was the same thing that was happening when you used to tell me tall tales as a kid. You played that trick simply because it felt good to be "one up" on big brother for a change and in this way also you were taking out your resentment over feeling second-best. Though of course you may never have admitted to yourself that these were the motives.

I'm not complaining about the trick, which in itself was trivial; it's just that I have misgivings about your motive. Of course, I could be wrong in this analysis of your motive.

My suspicion of a possible

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